



News Release

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Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge Celebrates Conservation, Culture, and Community Receiving \$1 Million in Additional Annual Funding to Expand Community Engagement

Albuquerque, New Mexico - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) Director Dan Ashe and U.S. Senator for New Mexico Martin Heinrich announced today that Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) will receive \$1 million in additional annual funding to engage urban communities and youth in conservation and outdoor recreation. The Refuge, located in Albuquerque's South Valley, is only five miles from downtown and has been working extensively with partners and community members to create a shared vision for opportunities to connect the Refuge with families and youth through conservation, culture, and community.

"Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge has the potential to become an essential ecological, educational, and recreational resource for families and kids in the Albuquerque area and across the region. Our goal is to accelerate this process by giving the refuge's outstanding staff additional resources to build and strengthen relationships with community partners and residents," said Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe. "Funding will be used to expand opportunities for families and kids to connect with nature, creating memories for a lifetime and fostering an appreciation for the importance of this unique landscape to both people and wildlife."

The Service recognizes that with increased urbanization, our youth may lose their connection to the natural world. In response, the Service created the Urban Wildlife Conservation Program that helps national wildlife refuges create partnerships and reach out to urban communities to provide new opportunities for them to learn about and take part in wildlife habitat conservation.

"There is so much opportunity at Valle de Oro to help New Mexico kids discover the incredible natural heritage of our state right in their backyard, while supporting vital river and habitat conservation," said U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich. "I am proud to stand with the community in Albuquerque's South Valley and secure resources to turn this 570-acre oasis into a place filled with educational and recreational opportunities."

The Service is committed to serving a growing diverse and urban audience, and has risen to that challenge. This funding demonstrates the Service's strong commitment to better serving people in cities across the country and the need to engage them more in efforts to conserve our nation's wildlife heritage.

"Valle de Oro holds so much promise as a place for kids and families to learn about our incredible natural heritage and enjoy the outdoors," stated U.S. Senator Tom Udall. "I'm proud to help secure resources so Valle de Oro can grow, continue to boost jobs and inspire generations to come."

Showing her support, U.S. Representative Michelle Lujan Grisham added, "One of the reasons Valle de Oro has received so much support is because of its proximity to urban communities. I appreciate this latest round of funding to expand educational opportunities and give families ownership of this wildlife refuge in their own community."

The Refuge was established in 2012 and is already engaging the local community through conservation, environmental education, special events, environmental justice, and partnerships embracing the importance of this cultural landscape to both people and wildlife.

"Valle de Oro Refuge is bringing a sense of pride into our neighborhood. We have a great community here that has sometimes been overlooked because of all the industry surrounding us," stated Sara Carrillo, Principal at Mountain View Elementary School in Albuquerque's South Valley. "We have very few opportunities for safe play and exploration outside. Mountain View used to be a farming community, and Valle de Oro is helping us get reconnected with the land and our heritage. It is giving our families a safe place to connect with nature, spend time together, be healthy, and reconnect with our history."

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service.

For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfws, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwshq, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>.

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